CONTENT WARNINGS

-claustrophobia

-unreality

-sharp tones

-darkness

[Theme music: “Some Spooky Sh*t Is Going On Here” by Theo Goodwin]

INTRO

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The Underwood Collection, Episode 15: Ghost Light

[Theme ends.]

[Tape recorder clicks on. Static is heard throughout.]

ADRIENE

[Sounds of high heels clicking on the floor are heard throughout] So what were you going to tell me?

ULYSSES

Morgan and I were doing research. You know, like our jobs.

ADRIENE

Into?

ULYSSES

We’re not sure if it’ll yield anything yet.

ADRIENE

I hate to be so blunt, but I heard you mention Frank. *[Sounds of heels stop]*

ULYSSES

...Yeah. And?

ADRIENE

He died last year, Ulysses. Are you sure it's such a good idea to go poking into that?

ULYSSES

Are you saying there's something to poke into?

ADRIENE

Are you feeling alright? You haven't been yourself since that infestation a few months ago.

ULYSSES

[testily] I'm fine.

ADRIENE

Of course. Ulysses, if it'll soothe your mind, I'm happy to provide details for you. I can give you the phone number of the rescue team assigned to Frank's case. You can hear from them why they know he's dead, even if they haven't found the body. I merely hesitated to offer it when the situation was so… raw.

ULYSSES

You have… follow up?

ADRIENE

[chuckles] This isn't a statement, Ulysses. We've lost one of our own. And as your boss, it's my responsibility to make sure you're coping with the aftermath.

ULYSSES

But you'll send it to me. Phone numbers, flight numbers, call logs, anything you have, anything they gave you--

ADRIENE

Just say the word.

ULYSSES

If you can send it to me-- anything at all-- I'd-- *[realising that they sound absolutely desperate]* I'd appreciate it.

ADRIENE

Of course. And— ah. I came by to give you this. *[Rustling papers]* When I didn't find you in your office, I assumed you might be in Morgan's.

ULYSSES

And you were right. Hurray.

ADRIENE

I'll have the information in your inbox by the end of day.

ULYSSES

[genuine] Thank you.

ADRIENE

Don't mention it.

[Sounds of heels walking away, a door shutting.]

[click]

ULYSSES

Well, if I get murdered too, at least I'll have this tape to let any successors know that your time is limited! Take a long vacation with no return ticket, and don't go by plane.

As for my gift? *[sound of rustling papers]* This is the statement of Kestrel Ike, regarding the tunnels beneath one of the theatres at Millikin University. Original statement given 8 December, 2016. Recording by UC Bamba, Head Curator of the Usher Foundation, Washington D.C. Statement begins.

ULYSSES (STATEMENT)

I love ghosts. Always have. When I was younger, my family and I would gather around the TV and watch all of those campy ghost hunting shows at night, and when I got older, it found its way into my podcast and streaming choices. *Spirits*, *What the Ghost?*, I was subscribed to all of them. Watching *Ghost Hunt U.K.* made me want to try my hand at ghost hunting. But unlike Europe, where haunted buildings seemed to be a dime a dozen, northern Illinois was a bit lacking, and the opportunity never seemed to present itself. So when I met someone who shared my love for it, I was beyond excited.

I met Emily, Emily Jackson, during my first semester at Millikin when I was the Assistant Paint Charge for a production of *Madea*. She was one of my crew, and we hit it off right away, bonding over the fact we were the oldest people there. It's hard to make friends your own age when you transfer into a school, so she was a welcome change. We didn't see each other much after the show ended, on account of her being a Stage Management Major

and me, Technical Theatre. We made it work though, hanging out every couple of weeks.

It was during one of these times, in mid-October, when we got the idea. It was our Fall Break, and we'd been at her apartment watching movies all day. We were watching some horror movie when I mentioned my love of ghosts, and her eyes lit up when I mentioned a bit of campus lore another friend had told me. Below the campus was a series of interconnected steam tunnels that hadn't been used in years, and through there you could get just about anywhere on campus. I ended by saying I wanted to go down in there one day, and maybe have some close encounters of the spooky kind. I saw a smile creeping across her face as she told me that while she couldn't get into those tunnels, the biggest theatre on campus had its own set of tunnels, and as one of their employees, she had the keys to them. Additionally, it was nine P.M. on the second to last day of Fall break; it wasn't like there was anyone to stop us. It seemed like a no-brainer. She grabbed her keys, I gathered some flashlights, and we began our journey.

Kirkland Fine Arts Center, usually shortened to KFAC, is the biggest theatre on campus. It was also completely dark when we entered, the only light coming from the red glowing numbers above the Stage Management Station. Emily motioned for me to follow her to the Station, explaining she

needed a flashlight before we could begin our excursion. The sudden burst of stark light sent me blinking when she flipped on the switch. After examining each light's beam, she finally settled on one and we made our way to the stage. I've said before that Kirkland is big, but staring out at the house from center stage it felt *massive.*

I thought I knew what over a thousand seats looked like before I came to Millikin, but at this moment I was in awe. Scores of empty seats sprawled out before me in the black, the first few rows lit by the ivory beams of the ghost light.

And I know what you're thinking about the name. But you have to understand, theatre people are a superstitious lot, and the story of the ghost light is no exception. They're equal parts necessity and story, originally used to keep unwitting crew members from plummeting to their deaths in the orchestra pit on days when no shows were being performed. Eventually, that grew to whispered legends of ghosts of the theatre using them for their midnight performances on days when the theatre was dark, earning them their name.

I snapped a few pictures of the light, the brilliant white orb against the ebony darkness of the theatre made for a beautiful image. It was here that I saw it for the first time. It was quick, but there was something *moving* in amongst the seats. I couldn't make out a shape, but saw a shade flitting amongst the seats in the house.

I tried to get a better look at it, but by the time I had turned to get a clearer field of vision, I saw nothing. I pushed it to the back of my mind as Emily motioned for me to follow her down a stairway and to the bottom floor of the theatre. She took me into a room referred to as the Grim Room, or as she called it, the Hell Room. It was *hot*. And not in the usual way. But in a dry, grueling way that threatened to choke the life out of me as we walked through the vast room of metal vents and cement supports.

The actual door to the tunnels was unimpressive. If I hadn't known what I was looking for I surely would've walked right past its metal frame, barely tall enough for me to get through. The space on the other side was far cooler, as we now found ourselves under the stage in a barely lit path of smooth concrete walls that came to a T, with two paths diverging.

Emily motioned for me to follow her down the longer of the two. There was an area just below the stage that was nothing more than a quick succession

of sharp turns, illuminated by stark industrial lights. I didn't understand why they were there, and if I'm being honest I still don't. The strange thing is that it was only three or four turns, but I remember thinking that I felt as though I was trapped.

It didn’t last long though, and I followed Emily out of there and into the only logical next step: a hallway wider than it was tall. Now, I'm not the tallest person, I'm only about 5'8 with shoes on, and I had to crouch down to almost half my height to pass without slamming my head against the metal paneling on the ceiling. As we were walking, I remember Emily mentioning how hard it would be for us to run, were we to actually *see* something spooky once we reached our destination.

We made it out quickly, not wanting to stay hunched over any longer than we had to. There was a short tunnel on the other side, one that made me pause. Were it not for the pale beams our flashlights cast on the cold cement floor I would have thought my eyes were closed. It was *black*, engulfing everything ahead of me. Emily chuckled at my hesitation, asking me if I wanted to turn back. But I’d come this far, no way was a little darkness going to stop me now. So off we went, walking amongst the piles of discarded furniture and pictures that looked at least as old as I am. There was a mirror leaned against one of the stacks, a long crack spanning the bottom half. I stopped to take a picture in it, making a joke about the

aesthetics of a selfie. Emily kept walking as I flipped through the images on my phone.

They were all difficult to see anything in, given the flash of my camera. But in the glare, I could see something. At first, I thought it was just a trick of the light, but the amount of detail… it couldn't be. It was just over my shoulder, a dimly lit entranceway, made from stone that looked *centuries* older than the campus. I tried to dismiss it as the dark getting to me, my mind playing tricks on me, anything to find reason in this image. I could feel my heart pounding against my chest as I flipped to the next picture. The tunnel was still there, its looming presence unmoving. My breathing hitched when I saw the shadow, stretching out of the tunnel. It was heading towards us, I knew it was.

Emily was next to me now, trying to look over my shoulder, asking me what was wrong.

She couldn't see it.

No one I've shown the pictures to can see it.

What happened next, I'm ashamed to say. I know leaving Emily there was an awful thing to do, but I was *scared* and confused and I… I ran. Fast. It was coming for us, for me, and I couldn't stay there. I could hear Em calling for me to wait as I raced out of the low ceiling, to the twisting, sharp turns, and stark industrial lights. The strange thing was when I was running, it was longer. It sounds crazy, I know, but there were more turns, the stones were older, I was… I think I was in the tunnel I'd seen in the mirror. My mind was racing, filled with cold, blind fear that these quick-coming twists and turns would entrap me down here like some modern-day Minotaur. My breath was labored, it felt like there was a fire raging in my lungs as I tried to break free of this twisting prison.

I don't know how long I ran for, or why it finally decided to let me go, but I stumbled into the Grim Room and found myself choking on the heat again. I didn't stop there, just caught my breath and kept going. I was up the stairs and onto the stage before I knew what was going on, panting in the beams of the ghost light. I still thought it was beautiful, staring into the hypnotizing black of the massive, dark theater. But this time, when I looked out into the house, I don't know what it was, and I know it could very well be because I was on edge because of what had happened in the tunnels, but I could've sworn… Have you ever heard of Shadow People? You probably get a lot of stories about them in your profession. And I know they've been disproven by

everything from sleep paralysis to heightened emotions, and I was *definitely* feeling some heightened emotions, but— I saw the shadows *move.* Black, distorted shadows came towards me, rushing up onto the stage and surrounding me. I should've looked up and seen what they were. I know I should've. But I fell to my knees, screaming. I don't know what I thought it would do, scare them away maybe?

Instead, I was grabbed by the shoulder by Emily, who dragged me out of Kirkland while I sobbed. She tried to get me to explain what had happened, why I was running, but I didn't say anything. I *couldn't.* I couldn't put it into words then, not even when we were back at her apartment awkwardly sipping hot chocolate. I thought that was the end of it. One creepy experience and that would be it. But out of the corner of my eye, whenever I'm alone, I *see* it. I see that dimly lit corridor with its cold stone and its twisting corners and looming shadows and I just—I think it's calling to me. It *wants* me to go back in there and I don't think it'll let me out this time. And that's why I came to you guys. I don't have anywhere else to turn.

I can't tell anyone at school. If anyone found out I was down there, Em and I both would be expelled, no questions asked. I'm not even supposed to know about the tunnels, and what Em and I did is technically considered trespassing. I read about this place online while looking for a way to get rid

of this memory, and it seemed like the only place that wouldn't laugh me out of the office or call me into the nearest hospital. After all, this is what you do, right? You help people in situations like this. I need your help, and I need it now, because I'm working on the next show in Kirkland, and I don't know what's going to happen when I go back there.

Statement ends.

[sounds of rustling papers] There are photos attached to this file, with attached notes from the statement giver that they were taken during, quote, "the encounter," unquote. They show the ghost light shining in an empty theatre.

It looks like Cass has already been through this, because they've left their own follow up notes, as well as re-printed photos which have been run through an app or something to enhance the brightness. The artificially brightened photos appear to have a figure creeping through the seats, and describing it as "humanoid" would be… too nice. The head's too big for the body, the arms are too long, the torso is too thin. Baby's first Spiral meet-and-greet.

It looks like Mx. Ike survived their return to the theatre, though, according to Cass's research. They've put some print-outs in the file: Playbills at Millikin, dated this year, with Mx. Ike's name listed among the crew.

Cass also noted that they reached out to Mx. Ike for a follow-up, but were first cursed out, and then told that the events of this statement never happened. It could absolutely be a Spiral thing, but it honestly just might be a trauma response.

Cass also made contact with the Emily Jackson mentioned, who verified that they were in the tunnels during October, and even said that she went down to investigate on her own after hearing about what her friend saw down there. She was absolutely adamant that there nothing of interest, which points both of their responses towards the work of the Spiral.

Or, God, maybe they're just repressing it. Who am I to judge? It's not healthy, but it… happens. I guess we'll never know. Which is essentially how my life goes now, apparently, just a cycle of not knowing--

[sounds of crackling]

MIRROR

Not knowing?

ULYSSES

[emphatically] Jesus Christ, what now?

MIRROR

[sounds of echoes throughout] Not knowing. Not knowing. Not knowing.

ULYSSES

What's *your* deal?

MIRROR

[Using Ulysses' voice] How would your close-minded god feel about that, I wonder?

ULYSSES

Okay, if I ask you to leave me alone, will you?

MIRROR

[overlapping with Ulysses' voice underneath] I was reborn and unborn and it was nothing short of euphoric.

ULYSSES

...You gave Cecil Coester's statement.

MIRROR

[Using their voice and grinning] Cecil Coester's statement.

ULYSSES

Oh, incredible. Are you going to kill me?

MIRROR

Incredible. In-credible. *In*-credible.

ULYSSES

Okay, fine, well, I'm taking that as a no until my heart stops. Have we got a deal?

MIRROR

Deal. Deal. Deal.

ULYSSES

Did you know Frank?

MIRROR

Know Frank. Frank. Know.

ULYSSES

Yes or no?

MIRROR

Yes. Yes. Know Frank. Frank notes.

ULYSSES

Notes? Do you have them?

MIRROR

Yes.

ULYSSES

Jesus, I--

MIRROR

I feel bad for you.

ULYSSES

Wow, I have reached a new low if a *reflection* thinks I'm desperate.

MIRROR

A reflection. A desperate reflection.

ULYSSES

...Look. It's been rough, okay? You don't have to make it worse. Even if I had no idea that there was a Spiral avatar in the walls, that's fine. That's fine! I can deal with that later. Follow-up question, can you pull vodka out of a mirror?

MIRROR

Shh. Shhhhh. Follow up. Shhhhhh. Deal with this. This now. Here.

ULYSSES

What?

MIRROR

[Frank's voice overlayed] I kept things out of your sight for protection. Our unnamed friend can keep them safe until you need them.

[rustling of papers]

ULYSSES

Oh, God.

MIRROR

Shhh. Shh. It's okay. It's okay. Take this. End recording.

[Forcefully] End recording. *[high pitched whining]*

[click]

VOICEOVER

The Underwood Collection will return July 13th.

[Theme plays]

OUTRO

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